

Montana Location Owner's Guide

What you need to know if a production company comes calling

Millions of dollars are added to the state's economy each year by film and video production companies and commercial still photographers who choose to work in Montana. One of the ways those production dollars get into Montana's economy is via the fees paid to private property owners for use of "locations."

Production companies and photographers produce feature films, documentaries, television shows, television commercials, print ads and catalog photographs. For convenience in this brochure, we'll refer to all such activities as the "film industry."

Locations can be as common as a wheat field, the interior of a bar or the front yard of a house in a residential neighborhood. In Montana, they also can be as exotic as an army fort replica built for the television movie *Son of the Morning Star* or an old homestead cabin surrounded by austere badlands.

Allowing the use of your home, land or business as a location can be an exciting and possibly profitable venture if the scope of the project and the process is clearly understood. And, because productions usually leave money behind with other businesses and landowners in the area, it can be a positive opportunity for the entire community.

This brochure is aimed at helping you evaluate the pros and cons of your own situation should you be approached by a production company about the use of your property as a location. Step-by-step guidelines about the process of becoming a "location" are provided inside.

The Impact of the Film Industry in Montana

The economic benefits of film industry productions in Montana are many. First, there are direct economic benefits of the money spent on wages, products and services. The production company itself spends dollars with local businesses on lodging, clothing, groceries, restaurants, fabrics, lumber, hardware, office supplies, laundry services, etc. Individual cast and crew members may spend money on any or all of the above plus leisure activities, books and magazines, souvenirs—the list could go on and on. Even temporary "extras" and curious visitors from neighboring areas will leave additional dollars within the community hosting a production company.

Because most of the money spent is "new" money brought in from out of state (which otherwise wouldn't be here), economists project that it has an impact in buying power for Montana businesses and employees that is three and one-half times the actual amount.

Productions also play a part in creating and retaining jobs within the state, as they allow Montana's freelance film crew members and support services to earn their living. These

commercial media projects are much like having a new, medium-size business move into the community, except that they generate thousands or millions of dollars of activity over a few months instead of a few years.

Location Owner Services

Information and Guidelines

Straightforward information about how the film industry works and what the location owner should consider is provided in this brochure and through direct contact with the Film Office. Sample location contracts will be provided upon request. However, the Film Office does not become involved in actual contract negotiations.

Location photos and resource listings

Photos of selected properties are kept on file for use in custom photo presentations requested by production companies. Property owners who would like to have their locations considered for inclusion in the state's location files are encouraged to submit photos. Contact the Film Office to request the Location Owner's Photo Information Packet that details how to shoot location photos and what additional information to include. For those locations selected, information about the site, equipment and livestock will be maintained and made available to interested productions.

Film Industry Services

Scouting

This includes location photography as well as information and assistance in finding and securing locations. An extensive photo library is used to provide photo presentations of Montana locations that are customized to meet the needs of inquiring production companies.

Production Assistance

Information and assistance regarding accommodations, equipment, transportation, crew members and local services are provided through direct contact and the Montana Production Guide.

Liaison

Information and assistance are offered with federal and state agencies, city offices and local businesses, as well as individual landowners and the general public.

The Process of Becoming a Location—a Step-By-Step Guide

A request to use your property as a location is, in fact, a business proposal. Since each project has specific considerations, it is impossible to address all situations. However, the following guidelines should provide a basic foundation on which to establish an agreement between property owner and film company that is successful for everyone.

- Initial contact is generally made by a location scout or location manager. This person is often hired locally by the film company but also may be from out of state. His/her credentials can generally be confirmed through the Montana Film Office.

- Determine the nature of the project and how the location will be used. It is reasonable to ask to read the script segment where the property will be used. Will there be smoke, fire, gunshots or other effects?
- Determine the exact number of days required for the shoot. Be aware that a “day” can be as long as 16 hours and can be either daytime or nighttime. Days required should include:
 - “prep days” (preparation time before actual filming)
 - days of actual filming
 - “strike” days or “wrap” days after filming (the time needed to return the location to the agreed upon condition)
 - back-up days (also known as “cover set” days).
- Arrange for a walk-through with the production manager or director to determine such specifics as:
 - exact interiors and exteriors desired for filming
 - where equipment and vehicles will be positioned or parked
 - any “off-limits” areas as determined by the owner
 - any areas (such as roof, trees, fences, windows) which may need to be used or altered during filming
- Determine which personal property in or on the location is desired for use, how and where to store items not used, and who will be responsible for packing and moving items.
- Determine who will be allowed “on set” (location) during periods of use and how this will be enforced. A feature film or television movie may have a crew of 60 to 150 people; commercials may require 5 to 40 crew members; documentaries and video crews usually require fewer.
- Determine rules and regulations regarding:
 - smoking
 - use of restrooms, water, electricity, kitchen, food, laundry, etc.
 - where meals will be eaten
 - trash collection and disposal
 - floor coverings
- Determine phone use and how the bill is to be covered (\$20 upfront courtesy? All calls collect? Calls to production office only?)
- Determine how the owner and family will be accommodated during location use and any living expenses that may be required.
- Designate parking for personal vehicles.
- Location fees are negotiable. The owner should feel comfortable with the amount agreed upon, and payment should be made in full prior to any filming.

- The owner may request and negotiate a security deposit.
- The owner should have agreed-upon specifics IN WRITING.
- The owner should get a certificate of insurance, including a hold harmless clause for protection in case of any injuries on the property. All production companies should carry insurance policies that cover third-party rentals for property damage and liability. A copy of the insurance certificate should be given to the owner before any crew comes on the property.
- It is important to understand that, with the uniqueness of each film project, unforeseen circumstances or even weather changes can require more time, additional space, additional personnel, etc. This is the norm in making motion pictures, so contingency plans, options and fees should be discussed with the production company.
- Determine clean-up requirements: who is responsible, time limit for completion (such as 24 to 48 hrs.), etc. Arrange for a final walk-through for owner approval.
- Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions! Make sure you fully understand the terms of the contract, and in turn, that your conditions are understood.

Money Walks and Talks

Location fees will vary for many reasons: the size of the production, the production budget, the length of time needed at a location, whether interiors or exteriors will be used, the size of space needed, use of furnishings or other personal property, etc. The Montana Film Office does not become involved in the location fee negotiation process other than to provide advice given within this brochure. The staff is happy, however, to answer any questions you have about the process of working with a production company.

Making money by allowing use of your property is encouraged, of course. It also should be considered that many productions choose to use locations here precisely because it can be less costly than using locations that may be closer to their home base. Like all businesses, they have budgets to meet and are looking for a good deal. Overinflating prices could cause a company to choose another location; it certainly would mean the company would not choose to select that location again.

How to contact us

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